

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSCE-00 PM-03 SP-02 INR-05

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9907

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

CINCPAC IMMEDIATE

CINCPACAF HICKAM AFB/HI IMMEDIATE

13AF CLARK AB, RP IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 1314

LIMDIS

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

CINCPACAF AND 13AF FOR CC

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, MMOL, IO, SN

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE PRIME MINISTER UNCONCERNED OVER NEWS REPORTS

U.S. MILITARY AIRCRAFT USE OF SINGAPORE FACILITIES

REFS: (A) SINGAPORE 1306, (B) 74 SINGAPORE 4974

1. FOLLOWING MEETING I HAD WITH PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW
MARCH 21 ON ANOTHER SUBJECT I TOLD HIM THAT SOMETHING HAD
ARISEN WHICH I BELIEVED HE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT, AND I HANDED HIM
TRANSCRIPT OF BBC NEWS REPORT (REF A) ALLEGING USE OF PAYA
LEBAR AS STAGING BASE BY U.S. MILITARY AIRCRAFT COVERING INDIAN
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OCEAN. MY THOUGHT WAS THAT IF HE HAD PROBLEMS OVER PUBLIC AIRING
OF THIS ISSUE WE SHOULD KNOW SOONER RATHER THAN LATER; I ALSO
FELT THAT MY CALL ON HIM OFFERED A FORTUITOUS OPPORTUNITY TO
DISCUSS THE IMPLICATIONS IF HE SO DESIRED.

2. PM LEE READ THE TRANSCRIPT, AND COMPLETELY UNCONCERNED.
HE COMMENTED THAT REPORTS OF THIS NATURE WERE BOUND TO HAPPEN, AND

THAT IN ANY EVENT IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO KEEP THE SOVIETS FROM LEARNING ABOUT STAGING OF INDIAN OCEAN SURVEILLANCE FLIGHTS FROM SINGAPORE BY U.S. AIRCRAFT ONCE THESE FLIGHTS BEGAN. HIS ADVICE WAS SIMPLY TO RIDE IT OUT.

3. PM LEE WENT ON TO SAY THAT ORIGINATOR OF BBC STORY, ADRIAN PORTER, HAD BEEN SOUR ON SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT EVER SINCE INCIDENT LAST YEAR OF HIJACKING OF VIETNAMESE AIRCRAFT TO SINGAPORE. PORTER HAD PRESSED SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT HARD ON QUESTION OF DISPOSITION OF HIJACKERS, AND WAS INCENSED WHEN LONDON OBSERVER AND NOT BBC BECAME RECIPIENT OF LEAK THAT HIJACKERS WOULD NOT BE RETURNED TO VIETNAM BUT RATHER PUT ON TRIAL IN SINGAPORE. PM LEE INDICATED THAT DECISION TO LEAK TO LONDON OBSERVER HAD BEEN MADE BY FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM HIMSELF ON GROUNDS THAT OBSERVER'S MASS CIRCULATION WOULD ASSURE MUCH GREATER PUBLIC ATTENTION THAN WOULD A BBC BROADCAST. PM LEE OFFERED NO FURTHER COMMENT, AND OUR MEETING CLOSED AT THIS POINT.

4. COMMENT: PM LEE'S LACK OF CONCERN OVER BBC REPORT IS REASSURING, AND I ASSUME ON THIS BASIS THAT NO FURTHER FALL-OUT CAN BE EXPECTED FROM THIS QUARTER. I CONTINUE TO BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT WE SHOULD ALLOW A SUFFICIENT INTERVAL (PERHAPS TWO WEEKS OR SO) TO ELAPSE BEFORE STAGING P-3 FLIGHTS THROUGH SINGAPORE TO ALLOW PUBLIC INTEREST TO SUBSIDE. SINCE WE HAVE YET TO HEAR FROM MINISTRY OF DEFENSE OR AIR STAFF ON DETAILS, IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT BY THE TIME ARRANGEMENTS ARE COMPLETE PRESS CONFIDENTIAL

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ATTENTION WILL HAVE SHIFTED ELSEWHERE, A FACTOR TO CONSIDER IS PROBLEMS WHICH MIGHT BE GENERATED FOR ASEAN AS A WHOLE IF ONE OF ITS COMPONENTS, SINGAPORE, IS TOO PUBLICLY LINKED WITH U.S. ROLE IN INDIAN OCEAN--THIS DESPITE FACT THAT BOTH THE PHILIPPINES AND THAILAND ARE ALREADY INVOLVED.

5. OF INTEREST IS REASONING BEHIND PM LEE'S RELAXED ATTITUDE. IN MY OPINION, HE HAS CONCLUDED THAT HAVING OPTED TO ASSOCIATE SINGAPORE WITH THE DEVELOPED WORLD, ESPECIALLY THE U.S., IN TERMS OF MARKETS, INVESTMENT CAPITAL, AND ACQUISITION OF TECHNOLOGY, HE MUST BE PREPARED TO PAY HIS DUES. NOT TOO MANY OTHER ASIAN LEADERS WOULD VIEW MATTER IN THIS SAME LIGHT.
HOLDRIDGE

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